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Ghana's Highlife Music: A Political History & Struggles of Upcoming Musicians

Hughes Kwesi Williams



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Ghana's Highlife Music: A Political History & Struggles of Upcoming Musicians

What is the impact and effect of Ghanaian Highlife Music? How did it evolve into Hiplife? Are the Struggles of Upcoming Musicians a reason why Ghana is losing its sound to Nigeria? What are the Effects of Ghanaian Music to the Economy?

Created in Ghana in the beginning of the 20th century, Ghana's Highlife Music is the result of the rhythmic structure of traditional Akan music paired with Western instruments. Its impact and effect on the youth and political scene in Ghana and across west Africa is still presently.

Created in Ghana in the beginning of the 20th century, Ghana's Highlife Music is the result of the rhythmic structure of traditional Akan music paired with Western instruments.

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My name is Akwesi, a Rising Ghanaian music producer and artiste. This is a quest to share and understand the Music Industry in Ghana.

Highlife Classic Old School – Ghana

Classic High-life from Ghana Old School. Sweet Talks FT A .B Crentsil, Adam and Eve Album. Hi-life Stars of Ghana. 01. Adam & Eve 02. Fakye Me 03. Womma Yenye Ewuradze Aye 04. Onyame Aye Ewie 05. Adam Nana





What is it like to be a Musician in Ghana today?

Doing music in Ghana is almost like running a business and does not entirely thrive on your talent, skill or appearance. It requires capital and some form of networking or connections to some key stakeholders and this can be very expensive.

The entertainment industry in Ghana hasn't been given the much needed attention by current and previous governments even though a few attempts have been made to push some initiatives which haven't really been successful.

Music as part of the entertainment industry contributes immensely to the economy. This is in the form of taxes paid by Record labels, artistes and organisers of music events such as concerts, award shows and talent hunts.

This can also be in form of taxes from radio and television channels for commercials, radio promotions and many other ways which most of the time have been overlooked.

The rhythmic flow of Ghana's Highlife Music Genre developed its unique sound as a result of the country's traumatic political history and a struggle for independence.

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A Brief Political History Of Ghana's Highlife Music

The rhythmic flow of Ghana's Highlife Music Genre developed its unique sound as a result of the country's traumatic political history and a struggle for independence.

Politics played a huge role in the evolution of Ghana's Highlife Music and its impact on the civic world.

From the tradition of royal talking drums, Ghana's Highlife Music was used for philosophical debates and communication. It was also used to pass coded messages intended for specific people.

Before you continue reading this, I highly recommend this article about [Ghana Beyond Aid Agenda: The Possibility of an Independent Ghana and the effect it will have on other African countries](#). It will give you a great juxtaposed perspective of where Ghana is today in relation to the economy and freedom from neo-colonialism. [Click here to open the Ghana Beyond Aid Article in a new tab.](#)





Ghana's Highlife Music – Ghana's Kyekyeku puts a fresh spin on Africa's musical heritage

Where did Ghana's Highlife Music Music Genre originate from?

Highlife is a popular music and dance genre across West Africa. It started in Ghana in the late 19th century with brass bands along the Ghanaian coast.

Highlife later spreading out through Western Nigeria and diffusing to the other West African states, reaching an all time high in the 1950's.

From the 1950s to the early 1970s Ghana led the way in West Africa with its popular highlife and Afro-rock music and its viable recording and music production industry.

Hidden multi-layered meanings in Ghana's Highlife Music

Sometimes, the music had hidden multi-layered meanings, likely to be understood by only a small number of people with specialised knowledge or interest while openly entertaining everyone else.

This depth is one of the factors that contributed to Ghana's Highlife Music's sustainability and growth.

Sometimes, the music had hidden multi-layered meanings, likely to be understood by only a small number of people with specialised knowledge or interest while openly entertaining everyone else.

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Revolution and Uprising Against the British:

Though the Ashanti uprising against the British was initially unsuccessful, it was their assertiveness which led to the creation of an art powerful enough to hide in plain view what it was intended to express.

The Ashanti people wanted to be free and this shared objective gave rise to the Ghana's Highlife Musical union.

Musicians like Nana Ampadu and Osibisa can be credited to the evolution of this melodic genre which later gave birth to Ghana's Hiplife Music, which is a skilful fusion of Ghanaian culture and hip hop.

Recorded predominantly in the Ghanaian Akan language, hiplife is rapidly gaining popularity throughout West Africa and abroad, especially in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Germany.

Recorded predominantly in the Ghanaian Akan language, hiplife is rapidly gaining popularity throughout Africa and abroad, especially in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Germany.

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Ghana's Highlife Music – Traditional Women's Music from Ghana- Ewe, Fanti, Ashanti, Dagomba

Though the Ashanti uprising against the British was initially unsuccessful, it was their assertiveness which led to the creation of an art powerful enough to hide in plain view what it was intended to express. The Ashanti people..

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Untapped Power of Ghana's Highlife Music

Despite the power within Ghana's Highlife Music, it has not been fully tapped for a specific purpose. No political movements used it as a main tool for rev. As a result, Highlife can not be confined or pointed back to one particular group.

Perhaps this is because of the immense power it yields or the fact that it cuts across many cultures both Geographically and Ideologically. This has contributed to its mystery and beauty that is seemingly uncorrupted and almost godly.

This spiritual identity is tempered by the osmotic folk music of the south.

The music of southern Ghana seems historically to have taken a more internal and pragmatic focus; the settled Ashanti south incorporated music as a re and pleasure in and of itself rather than as a billboard for their identity as a tribal entity.

This is reflected in the simpler folk style, which has simmered into existence with a gradual influence from neighboring Benin and Tongo.

Despite the power within Ghana's Highlife Music, it has not been fully tapped for a specific purpose. No political movements used it as a main tool for revolt. As a result, Highlife can not be confined or pointed back to one...

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Examples of Ghanaian Traditional Songs:





In these societies, participation in music is restricted by both age and gender, and only women perform these songs using instruments and techniques that have been designated appropriate for them.

Each song serves a specific purpose, whether it is purely for recreation, like the gabada of the Ewe, or for a rite such as marriage, as in "Ooi yaada" of the Dagomba. Liner notes include introductions to age- and gender-specific Ghanaian music, and detailed track notes. You can read more about it at [folkwa](#)

Ghana's Highlife Music yields immense power & cuts across different Geographic and Ideologic spaces. This has contributed to its mystery and beauty that is seemingly uncorrupted and almost godly.

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Sample video of Ghanaian traditional music from The Ghana Project 2013:

Sample video of Ghanaian traditional music



Ga Traditional Songs (Live Music From Ghana) – Part 1

Working with Ghanaian musician Ko Nimo, our aim is to help preserve some of the important cultural musical traditions from Ghana, West Africa.

This first video is a short sample of traditional music recorded in Ghana 2013/14 as part of a self-funded, self-initiated project.

The project came about largely in response to Ko Nimo lamenting the loss of traditional music as the old people pass on, or as he puts it 'the libraries are burning'. Ko Nimo is Uncle, mentor and friend to us and we all owe him enormously.





This video is great to show students in school settings. It has captured the imagination of many age groups, from 4 years up!

There is much unique footage here that would be new to many. We will be continuing to post further videos of the artists we worked with.

The GHANA SINGER of TRADITIONAL MUSIC in ACCRA | AFRICASIAEURO

Ghana traditional music female singer in Accra singing high life music. Ghana Indigenous Music artists are excelling all over the global music scene.

This Artist is a native of Ghana, Ewe tribe, with her roots in Ghana's Eastern parts bordering to Togo. Her style of indigenous music is amazing to say the least.



Evolution of Music in Ghana: From Traditional Akan to Highlife and Hiplife Music:

The Ghanaian music industry has evolved over the years and has become very attractive for a lot of young Ghanaians who want to make a living out of making music.

Many other genres of music like Trap, EDM, Dancehall etc. as compared to Traditional Ghanaian 'HighLife' music and it's cousin 'HipLife' which was originated by Reggie Rockstone.

They have managed to find their audience and this has enabled Ghanaian music to reach unimaginable heights and international appeal.

Ghanaian Music – Struggles of Upcoming Musicians:

Musicians in the country are hardly paid Royalties and some may have never received any their entire music career even though they invest large amount of money for music promotion and shooting videos.

Almost all Ghanaian musicians make a living from performing at shows and tend to charge huge amounts to perform.

It's in recent years that some business brands in trade and communication have merged with some musicians to have Endorsement Deals which have be very beneficial to these musicians.

Musicians in the country are hardly paid Royalties and some may have never received any their entire music career even though they invest large amounts of money for music promotion and shooting videos.

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For the upcoming musician in Ghana, pursuing music without a Record label, enough personal funding or some connects can be very challenging. The or thing that has been super beneficial has been Social Media and some of its tools that have been tailored to get information across to all parts of the world

Young creatives across the world and not only in Ghana, have taken advantage of this to make their music heard. One of such platforms is Soundcloud which has played a big role in the success of some musicians in Ghana like myself Akwesi.





Ghana's Highlife Music – Does the Nigerian Music Industry have an influence on Ghana's Music Industry?

Does the Nigerian Music Industry have an influence on Ghana's Music Industry?

Copying has always been our culture, the Ghanaian culture. The moment one artiste takes a bold step, takes a risk and comes up with something innova and it is successful – it is a surety that a thousand other artistes would copy the same process to attain the same success.

Back in January 9, 2014, [Entertainment Ghana](#) put up an opinion piece about The Nigerian influence on Ghana Music.

It said: "Nigerian music is flourishing and the Nigerian artistes are responsible for such a feat. It is implicitly normal for anybody to copy anything that is positive, especially when the copying is done well – but is disheartening and sickening to realize that the new generation of Ghanaian musicians are feverishly singing or trying to sing like their overly successful Nigerian counterparts."

The Nigerian Music Industry has definitely had an influence on Ghana's Music Industry. But is Ghana copying Nigeria's musical style and loosing hers?

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Is Ghana Borrowing Nigeria's Musical Sound?

"Artists like R2Bees, Sarkodie, 5five, Echo, Fresh Prince, 4X4, Bradez, Rana and many upcoming Ghanaian artistes have songs with lines and choruses th sound like that of 2Face, D'Banj, PSquare among others.

It is exasperating to hear these Ghanaians try frantically to sing their choruses in that Nigeria style, that 'pidgin' mode and as if by design, some of them would always want to mention the name 'Naija' in their songs..."

70s Highlife Music of Ghana and Nigeria





The Evolution of Traditional Ghanaian Music and Influence from Western Society:

Ghana is a country rich in ancient culture, tradition, history, and music. A research took place during January and February of 2005. It consisted of study the role of traditional music in contemporary Ghanaian society as well as its use in rural and urban areas. Project methodology included various interview travel to rural communities, archival research, and audio recordings of traditional music.

Project goals included an understanding of how traditional music is used in contemporary Ghanaian society, why traditional music is fading, how Ghanaia feel about this loss, and any significant differences between its use in rural and urban areas.

Wherever you go, this is the music you will hear blaring from homes, taxis, and markets. Because of this exposure to Western music, interest in traditional music is dying dramatically among the youth.

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Exposure to Western music has had a serious impact in Ghana and it can easily be observed on any average day in Accra and everywhere in Ghana for t matter.

The popular music in Ghana today is American hip-hop, pop, rock, country, and gospel as well as Ghanaian highlife and hiplife, a combination of African Western elements, and music from other African countries.

Wherever you go, this is the music you will hear blaring from homes, taxis, and markets. Because of this exposure to Western music, interest in tradition music and in some cases exposure to it is dying, most dramatically among the youth.

Further Reading and Research on Ghana's Highlife Music

1. The Evolution of Traditional Ghanaian Music and Influence from. Western Society. Lindsay Albright. Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Bridget Teboh, History Department.
2. Ghana and the World Music Boom. John Collins, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana.





THIS AKWESI. this Akwesi.

JULOR

Written by Akwesi simultaneously hearing Sarkodie perform from DJ Fortune's balcony at Legon

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MORE*

Written by Boy Kay, Kros & Kofi Pages after eating Gob3 in Kros' room

04:29

AGORO

Written by Akwesi the whole day

02:46



PRODUCED & COMPOSED IN THE KITCHEN

'MORE' CO-PRODUCED BY KROS

MIX ENGINEERED BY KROS & MADEMUSIQ

ART DIRECTION BY KOKO_KONCEPTS

SPECIAL THANKS TO GOD & THE HIGH HOMIES

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Stereo



Ghana's Highlife Music About the Author – Hughes Kwesi Williams

About the Author – Hughes Kwesi Williams

Hughes Kwesi Williams, known in the Ghanaian music scene as Akwesi – a Ghanaian name for a person born on Sunday.

He is the first of 5 siblings. A Graduate of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Kumasi, Ghana where he studied Publishing.

Besides music, he is a professional Graphic Designer & Illustrator. His music is geared towards having a positive impact on everyone who listens to it. Check out links to his social media accounts here – [Hughes Kwesi Williams](#).

He has a new EP called "This is AKWESI." which features songs like JULOR & MORE. It is available here on [iTunes](#) and [Apple Music](#).





Akwesi ashanti Dagomba Ewe Fanti Ga Traditional Songs ghana Ghana's Highlife Ghana's Highlife Genre Ghana's Highlife Music ghanaian Ghanaian music producer Ghanaian Traditional Songs highlife Highlife Classic Old School hiplife Hiplife Music Hughes Kwesi Williams industry Music music producer musicians Nigeria political history traditional traditional Akan music Traditional Ghanaian Music traditional music Traditional Women's Music Untapped Power upcoming musicians

 Share This Article



Hughes Kwesi Williams ✓

West Africa

I'm Hughes Kwesi Williams, known in the Ghanaian music scene as Akwesi which is a Ghanaian name for a person born on Sunday. I'm the first of 5 siblings. I'm a Graduate the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Kumasi, Ghana where I studied Publishing. Aside music I'm a professional Graphic Designer & Illustrator. I'm hoping music has a positive impact on everyone who listens as well as everything I do.

10 Comments



Linus Owusu ✓ West Africa

Added a comment on December 4, 2018 at 12:53 am

Very deep .I really like how you put all together. Great story

[← Reply](#)
[Share](#)



Hughes Kwesi Williams ✓ West Africa

Replied to comment on December 4, 2018 at 1:47 am

Thank you. Any additional information you think I left out?

 Reply
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Ghanaian songs or artists.

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Hughes Kwesi Williams ✓ West Africa

Added a comment on December 4, 2018 at 1:50 am

That's quite unfortunate but there are equally good Ghanaian artistes making waves in Africa. Sarkodie, M.anifest, Stonebwoy, Kwabena Kwabe Shatta Wale to mention a few.

↩ Reply | ↪ Share



Daisy Mwikali ✓ East Africa

Added a comment on December 4, 2018 at 1:20 pm

The duplication mentality has also affected business. Instead of expiring creativity, we prefer to ape what it already in the market. This ends up bringing unhealthy competition and everyone suffers. Thank you for this detailed outlook but what is the fix?

↩ Reply | ↪ Share



Rebecca Nekesa East Africa

Added a comment on December 4, 2018 at 7:24 pm

That's some long history. Am not a fan of African music but most African governments do not support music as an art. We don't celebrate our own so how will the music be appreciated out there.

↩ Reply | ↪ Share



Kwesi Nana West Africa

Added a comment on December 5, 2018 at 12:33 am

Akwesi, thank you for the enlightenment. You have patently shown why Ghanaian music has fallen behind. I hope your next article would be to explore how we can overcome this gap so we can reach at least parity with our Nigerian fellows. The thing about Nigeria is they have the naira and bloody thing would sell. And they are exceptionally supportive of their own. In that sense, we can say they are patriotic to their own. In Ghana, we despise seeing others progress. I honestly don't know where we got that backward culture from.

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Koo Letta ✓ East Africa

Added a comment on December 6, 2018 at 6:05 pm

Honestly I rarely hear of Ghana when it comes to music

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Impact of Ephraim Amu and the likes of Gbeho in creating an identity and in effect a genre or sub theme largely ignored or?

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Cosmos Owiredu

Added a comment on December 18, 2018 at 9:09 am

Very insightful, Good analysis from there, didn't know certain things but now I do all thanks to you.

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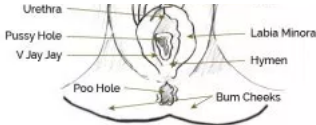
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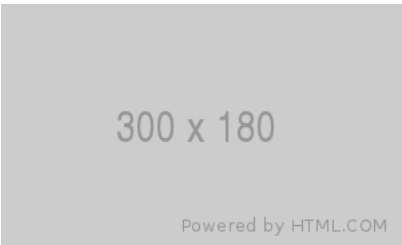
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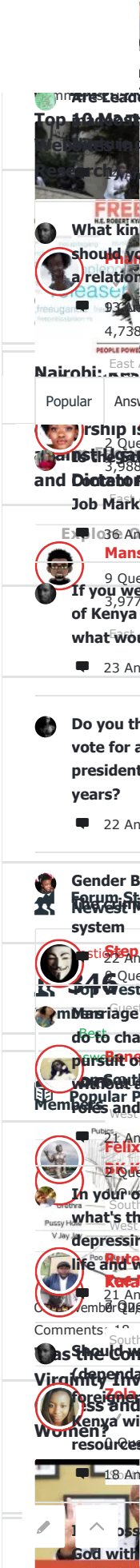
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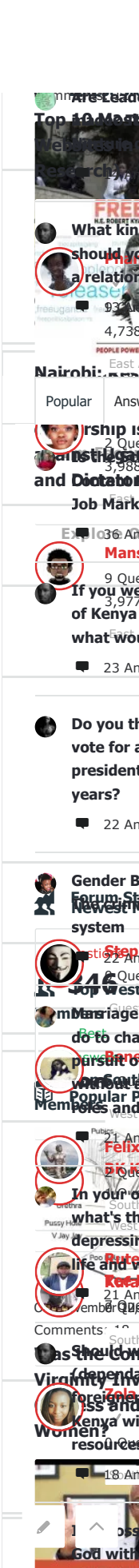
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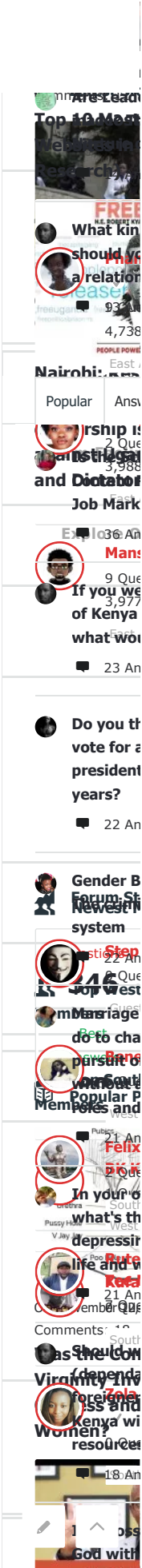
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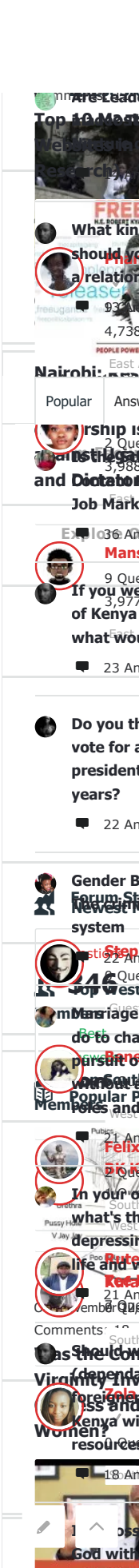
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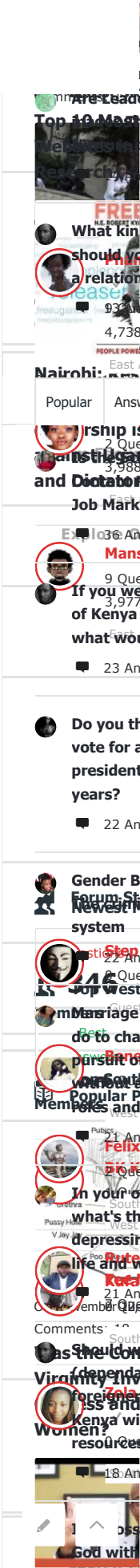
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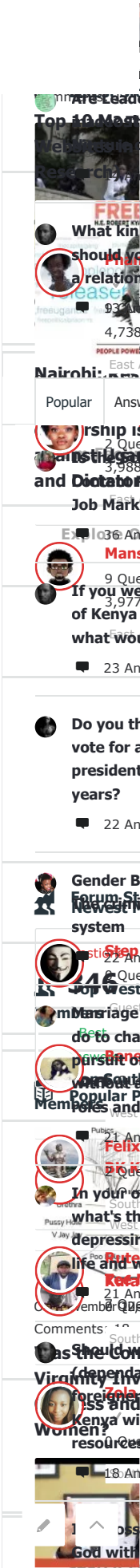


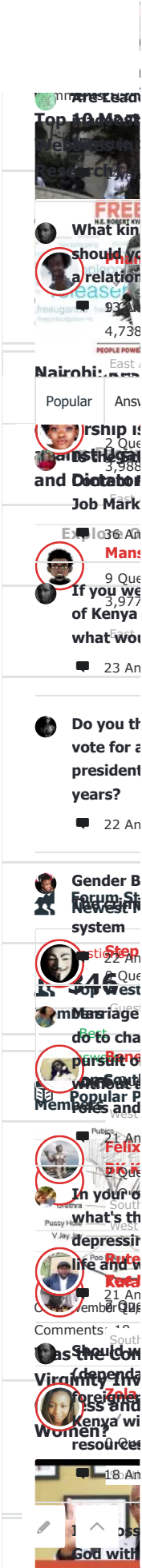


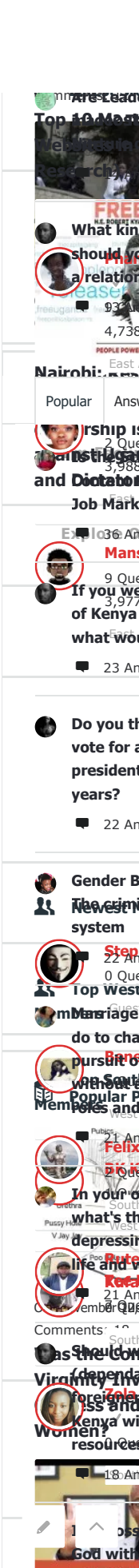














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